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is that the Ilori " icon " is omnipotent, and they, therefore, try hard not to incur its wrath. It is inflexibly just and punishes harshly those who deviate from the law; it is a goddess of equity, as it were; a kind of Themis, and in the practical life of the southern Abkhasians and of the Samurzaqanoans, there is, therefore, no " saint ", no " icon ", no deity equal to the Ilori " icon "; it determines finally and irrevocably all matters, whether civil or criminal, which the crown court has not been able to settle to the satisfaction of the popular idea of fair play. Even in the case of matters upon which judgment has been passed by crown courts, but where the decision has not satisfied the disputing parties, appeal is made to its tribunal. The trial is conducted as follows: A kind of arbitration court is set up which imposes upon the accused the obligation to take a propitiatory oath before the Ilori " icon ". If the matter is unimportant it is determined by a village tribunal which provides one or two co-swearers; but if the matter is serious (insult to one's honour, murder, etc.) the representatives of the parties participate in the trial with the judges. " Swearing in " follows, but the number of co-swearers increases; thus, for instance, 1–2 *t'avadi-s*, 2–3 *aznauri-s*, 5–6 peasants, 1–2 namesakes, 1–2 maternal relations, 1–2 relations of the female line of the *gvari*, etc., are frequently appointed as co-swearers. The oath is administered on *Wednesdays* and *Fridays*. The accused swears before the icon that he is innocent, the co-swearers confirm his declaration, and there the matter ends. If the accused is unable to take the oath, he submits obediently to the punishment imposed upon him. From the day of the taking of the oath onwards the plaintiff breaks off all relationship with the defendant and his co-swearers. " The icon is between us (parts, separates us)," says the orthodox Abkhaz. It is impossible to evade this custom; it is an Abkhasian's profound conviction that infringement of this custom (the re-establishment of relationship), as also a false oath, will not pass unpunished; the " icon " punishes with sickness and even with death, if the accused does not come to his senses in time and confess himself in the wrong. At the death of all the members of the guilty family, the wrath of the " icon " recoils on the plaintiff. To avert the chastisement of the " icon ", as of Abkhasian gods in general, the guilty person must pray and make offerings to the " icon "; he must also compensate his opponent's material losses and obtain the latter's consent thereto; they both set out for Ilori with gifts, prescribed by sorceresses, and they pray there to the " icon " for forgiveness of their sins; they bring goats, bullocks, and money. This is called the reciprocal forgiveness-prayer (*eybs-nkhvara*). From this day normal relations are restored between the parties. If one of the parties does not agree to make peace, the other party can *akho-dcholkhva*, " buy back his head," i.e. redeem

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224 539 according to another version). The gods revived the goat and destined it to fall a prey to our hunter. On the following morning, on his way back, he sighted a wild goat, killed it, and to his horror and amazement in its body he found his stick (knife).[1]

These *azhwèyp'shaà* have eternally youthful daughters, who often have love affairs with the hunters whom they reward with plenty of game. They select bachelor hunters as their object of love. One of them, however, once fell madly in love with a married Abkhaz; their friendship lasted for many years; often she herself visited him. One day, at dawn, the hunter's wife found the daughter of the gods, whose beauty was more than earthly, in the arms of her husband. The two were asleep on the balcony of the corncrib. A light breeze had disturbed the golden curls of the lovely goddess, and a few tresses lay in the dust. The wife acted in a manner born of pure love and sympathy. Quietly approaching the sleeping couple she lifted up the golden curls of the beautiful goddess and placed them so that they would not fall into the dust. When the goddess awakened she was so struck with the magnanimity of the beautiful wife of her beloved that she restored her husband to her, and forever forbade her sister-goddesses to have love affairs with married men.

224 Hunting is a sacred sport to the Abkhasians, and it is the custom never to talk of the hunter when he is hunting, but to say, if necessary, "he has gone somewhere." The hunters divide their prey into equal proportions; the head of the animal or bird, however, is given in addition to the one who killed it. Anybody whom the hunters encounter by chance also gets an equal share. Nor are the neighbours forgotten. Each goes up to the prey, and sprinkling it and also the successful hunter with some grain, says: "May gods grant thee a better one on another occasion!"

[526] Any kind of falsehood or evasion of the rules of hunting consecrated by custom is severely punished by order from above. The following story may be quoted as an illustration of this:—

[539] A well-known hunter once killed a wild goat, and another hunter, having heard a shot, ran up to him. The successful hunter said: "Behind that corner there is hiding another goat which you can easily follow up; it will be better to take home a kill each than to divide one between." The second hunter ran in the direction indicated but found no goat there. For this lie the gods punished not only the hunter himself but also his whole *gvari*; they have never since shot a single head of game.

[1] This story is written down from the words of A. Kardava, a Megrelian shepherd. In his version the wild boar figures instead of the goat, and *tqashi-mep'e*, king of the woods, instead of *Azhwèyp'shaà*.